



# Houston, Texas Hits a Grand-Slam for Brownfields Redevelopment

## Houston, TX

**T**he Houston Brownfields Assessment Pilot is leading the nation in brownfields reuse, playing a key role in the assessment, cleanup, and redevelopment of more than 986 acres of brownfields and leveraging more than \$500 million in redevelopment funding. The Houston Pilot focuses on the inner-city and downtown areas that were neglected as the city experienced an economic boom in the 1970s and 1980s that pulled businesses and residents out of the urban core to the expanding development of outlying greenfields. Abandoned and idle properties downtown were left with the perception of environmental contamination that for years stymied redevelopment. The efforts of the City of Houston's Brownfields Redevelopment Program have led to these inner-city brownfields being assessed, cleaned up, and redeveloped for such uses as a major league baseball park, a 450-acre golf course, a performing arts center, an aquarium and entertainment complex, and nearly 1,000 new housing units. The city's Brownfields Redevelopment Program has been aided by funding from EPA with a \$200,000 Brownfields Assessment grant and \$600,000 in Showcase Community awards.

On March 30, 2000, the Houston Astros got a new home—Astros Field (formerly Enron Field)—a 42,000-seat baseball stadium built on a 38-acre former brownfield. The Pilot-targeted site historically contained a railroad station, an industrial facility, and a number of corrugated-metal buildings. The site's owner, Harris County Sports Authority, funded environmental assessments at the site, entered the property into the Texas Voluntary Cleanup Program, and funded the site's cleanup. Astros fans are now enjoying an open-air ballpark that features a retractable roof that can be closed on hot summer days or during bad weather. Located on the east side of downtown Houston, the air-conditioned ballpark offers spectators a spectacular view of the Houston skyline. The Astros Field property also includes the renovated Union Station, which houses cafes, retail shops, and a tour theater. The \$310 million redevelopment project has created 223 new jobs and is a leading force behind the revitalization of downtown Houston.

Another recreational reuse project has been completed in the southern area of Houston. In the summer of 2002, two championship 18-hole golf courses opened to the public on a 450-acre site that served as the city's primary landfill until its closure in 1979. The landfill has been sealed with state-approved capping materials, and a landfill gas extraction system has been installed to address the relatively small amounts of landfill gas that are emitted. The site has been and will continue to be monitored. In 1997, prior to the Pilot's involvement, the owner of 422 acres of the site, Browning Ferris



*Housing for senior citizens, built on a former Brownfield.*

## JUST THE FACTS:

- At the request of the property owner and developer, the Brownfields Pilot acted as a liaison for the \$77,000 purchase of a city-owned brownfield to be included as part of a \$23 million golf course redevelopment project.
- Another of Houston's former brownfields has been transformed into a world-class aquatic entertainment, dining, and meeting complex, using more than \$873,000 in cleanup funding and \$18 million in redevelopment funding leveraged by the Brownfields Pilot.
- Houston has also redeveloped brownfields for residential reuses, including a 64-unit affordable housing development for seniors and a 74-unit, mixed-income apartment building.

*The efforts of the City of Houston's Brownfields Redevelopment Program have led to many inner-city brownfields being assessed, cleaned up, and redeveloped for such uses as a major league baseball park, a 450-acre golf course, a performing arts center, an aquarium and entertainment complex, and nearly 1,000 new housing units.*

Industries, selected EnCap Golf LLC to redevelop the site into two 18-hole golf courses. In 1998, the property owner and EnCap enlisted the Houston Pilot to help coordinate with government agencies to secure various permits and assist with community outreach. The Pilot acted as a liaison for the \$77,000 purchase of an adjacent city-owned brownfield to include as part of the redevelopment project. The Pilot also assisted with the project by updating and requesting support from the stakeholders involved, as appropriate. In addition to the golf courses, the \$23 million redevelopment project includes a clubhouse, a practice and training facility, a pitch-and-putt course, maintenance facilities, cart paths, and access roads. It is estimated that the city will receive \$22,000 per year in property taxes.

At another cleaned up brownfield in downtown Houston stands the \$92 million Hobby Center for the Performing Arts. This site was the former location of the Houston Coliseum, whose aging structure proved to be beyond a cost-effective renovation. The City of Houston razed

the old coliseum, and the Houston Music Hall

Foundation acquired the site to build the Hobby

Center in Houston's Theatre District. The property

owner funded assessments and cleanup of the site, which included removal of lead- and asbestos-contaminated soil. The three-year redevelopment project has been completed, and the new performing arts center opened in May 2002. The Center includes a 2,650-seat hall designed for a broad range of performances, such as Houston's Broadway Series, and a 500-seat theater with a full orchestra pit. This public/private, nonprofit endeavor has created more than 200 new jobs.



*One of Houston's brownfields,  
just prior to redevelopment.*

On February 15, 2003, the Downtown Aquarium held its grand opening on a former brownfield, a 7-acre city-owned property that was previously home to Houston's Fire Station No. 1 and the nearby Central Waterworks plant. The property has been transformed into a world-class aquatic entertainment, dining, and meeting complex offering a 400-seat seafood restaurant; a 6,000-square-foot ballroom; a cafe, lounge, and gift shop; and a plaza with fountains, a 90-foot Ferris wheel, and a gas-powered scale model train. The centerpiece of the complex is a public aquarium with more than 500,000 gallons of water in underwater tanks and 200 species of domestic and international marine life. The Pilot helped leverage more than \$873,000 in cleanup funding and \$18 million in redevelopment funding for the site.

The Houston Pilot has also been instrumental in the transformation of brownfields for residential reuse. In a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood in Houston's East End, the Pilot performed environmental assessments at a 2.7-acre site that the Latino Learning Center (LLC) redeveloped as a 64-unit affordable housing development for seniors. The LLC used a \$3.8 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to build the housing complex on half of the property, while the other half will house a Seniors' Day and Health Care Center and a 5,500-square-foot multi-service community center. Other residential reuse projects include a 74-unit, mixed-income apartment building known as Washington Courtyards. This brownfields redevelopment project is part of a larger revitalization plan for the Washington Avenue Corridor, which includes a charming traffic circle, a tree-lined entertainment plaza, a village center, and a civic plaza.

The redevelopment projects described here represent only a sampling of what the Houston Brownfields Pilot has accomplished in assisting the City of Houston to assess, clean up, and redevelop its brownfield properties.

## CONTACTS:

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Or visit EPA's Brownfields Web site at:  
<http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/>